



Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change

A Collective Strategy for Ireland, 2019-2023

Part of *Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change*, a cross-European project



June 4th, 2019

Introduction

This strategy represents the first Irish output of the four-year, cross-European project, *Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change* (see Appendix A for the background to this project). The purpose of the strategy is to help embed restorative justice and restorative practices within the Irish criminal justice system, building on existing practices and stimulating new work to fill gaps in policy and practice (see Appendix B for a brief overview of the current state of the field within Ireland). It aims to integrate all the information collected during a symposium which took place on March 1st, 2019, at Maynooth University, bringing together 94 persons working across the criminal justice system (see Appendix C for the report from this event). People who were interested in the event but could not attend, were given an opportunity afterwards to respond by email to the questions which were asked of attendees on the day.

In April 2019, a strategy was drafted on the basis of the collected information (totalling around 14,500 words). In late April, the draft was distributed among the project's Stakeholder Group for comment. The Stakeholder Group, which numbers 221 people as of May 30th, 2019, includes everyone who attended the symposium on March 1st, as well as those who could not make it that day, but have since expressed an interest in being involved in the project.

We received feedback about the draft strategy from 18 individuals and organisations. This was overwhelmingly positive, and the three Strategic Pillars proposed in the draft strategy – **1) accessibility, 2) knowledge and 3) cultural change** – have been retained, forming the basis of this document. Some amendments and clarifications were requested and made, and we are confident that this final strategy addresses all the feedback we received.

Each Strategic Pillar is comprised of a statement of principle and a series of objectives and potential actions. The term 'potential actions' is used intentionally to denote that we will work collaboratively with the Stakeholder Group during this project (2019-2023) to determine which actions (including, but not limited to, those listed in this document) should be prioritised and how these should be implemented. Soon, we will open a new call to identify persons who are willing and able to contribute to this process. We will also work closely with project partners in other countries, while seeking to evaluate any actions which we undertake.

Achieving the goals set out in this strategy will not be quick or easy, but ten years on from the report of the National Commission on Restorative Justice ([2009](#)), we believe that the time has come fully to implement restorative justice across Ireland. The recent adoption of the Council of Europe Recommendation concerning restorative justice in criminal matters ([2018](#), [2018b](#)) provides a fantastic opportunity to advance this area of work. The document begins by answering some key questions regarding restorative justice and restorative practices in the Irish criminal justice system, before outlining the three Strategic Pillars. You can then find more information about the background to the project, the usage of restorative justice in Ireland, and the Maynooth symposium, in three subsequent appendices.

Restorative Justice in Ireland – Key Questions

<p>What is restorative justice?</p>	<p>The Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017 s.2(1) defines restorative justice as: “any scheme administered for the time being under which, with the consent of each of them, a victim and an offender or alleged offender engage with each other to resolve, with the assistance of an impartial third party, matters arising from the offence or alleged offence”</p> <p>The Council of Europe Recommendation concerning restorative justice in criminal matters (2018: Rule 3) defines restorative justice slightly more broadly as: “any process which enables those harmed by crime, and those responsible for that harm, if they freely consent, to participate actively in the resolution of matters arising from the offence, through the help of a trained and impartial third party”</p> <p>We believe that, the more that stakeholders are brought into communication and enabled to participate in deliberations and decision-making, the more restorative a process can be. This means that, in the first instance, restorative justice should seek to include all victim(s), offender(s) and their supporters and other relevant persons in a dialogue. However, as is noted in the Council of Europe Recommendation’s Rule 8, we recognise that the ideas and principles underpinning restorative justice can also be used to design practices which do not involve dialogue between victims and offenders, including innovative approaches to reparation, victim recovery and offender reintegration. Some examples of these practices are outlined in Rule 59, perhaps the best known of which in the Irish context is the Offender Reparation Panel. Rules 8 and 59 make clear that such practices cannot fall within a restorative framework unless they are designed and delivered in accordance with restorative principles (see Rules 13-17 for an outline of these principles). As per Rule 60, restorative justice should also be available in the criminal justice system, beyond the criminal procedure. Our plans for making restorative justice more accessible and better known and understood can be found under Pillars 1 and 2 respectively.</p>
<p>What are restorative practices?</p>	<p>Restorative Practices Ireland (O’Dwyer, 2014: 8) describes restorative practice as: “an approach to building and maintaining interpersonal relationships, resolving conflict and repairing damaged relationships.”</p> <p>For the purpose of this project, ‘restorative practices’ refers to the application of the restorative framework in criminal justice, in all manners other than those described as ‘restorative justice’ above. This includes with respect to how all those who work within or with the criminal justice system relate to each other, and to all members of the community, on a day-to-day basis. This also describes the proactive use of circle processes and other approaches to building relationships, sharing information and creating more inclusive decision-making processes within criminal justice agencies, and among practitioners and members of the community. Rule 61 of the Council of Europe Recommendation and its associated commentary outline how restorative practices can be used proactively and for relationship building and inclusive decision-making in the criminal justice context. We believe that restorative practices can help initiate and support cultural change within criminal justice agencies; our plans for using restorative practices to achieve this goal can be found under Pillar 3.</p>

Who can participate in restorative justice?	We believe that victims and offenders are usually best placed, once fully informed, to determine whether restorative justice is right for them. At the same time, trained professionals must be enabled to assess whether restorative justice is necessarily in the interests of all parties in each case. A person's desire to participate is not the only factor which should be considered, but assessments should occur on a case-by-case basis. While the nature and circumstances of an offence must be considered, the offence type should not automatically disqualify a case from restorative justice. Services should also be flexible enough to enable as many persons as possible to participate (see the Recommendation's Rule 18 and Rule 27 and its commentary).
When can restorative justice be used?	We believe that, as per Rules 6 and 19 of the Recommendation, restorative justice should be available at all stages of the criminal justice process, including as a diversion from court, at the pre-sentence stage and post-sentence. This does not mean that it should be used instead of prosecution in all types of cases; in many serious cases, the public interest requires that restorative justice only takes place alongside or following prosecution. Again, the question of when restorative justice should occur is best determined on a case-by-case basis, in collaboration with those who wish to participate. This means that restorative justice is relevant to the whole criminal justice system and should be explored as part of all efforts to support victim recovery, to manage, rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders, and to prevent crime.
Is restorative justice always the same?	The nature, extent and dynamics of the preparation, practice and follow-up required, depends entirely on the situation in which restorative justice is taking place. For example, its use in cases of serious interpersonal violence is different than its use with low-tariff acquisitive offences. Levels of vulnerability, trauma and mental health must always be carefully assessed and taken into consideration when determining if or how restorative justice will take place. Similarly, levels of practitioner training and experience must reflect the seriousness and complexity of the circumstances and the vulnerabilities of the parties (Keenan, 2018). As noted earlier, we also believe that the restorative framework can be used to inform interventions for either party in cases where dialogue is not possible, or if one party does not wish to participate.
How does this work relate to other sectors?	While this project focuses exclusively on the criminal justice system, we believe that this work will complement, and has much to learn from and share with, similar work which is taking place in other sectors across Ireland, including in local communities, workplaces and educational and social care settings.

We hope that this provides clarity regarding our approach to this work. If you have any questions, or would like to join the Stakeholder Group, please get in touch by emailing Dr. Ian Marder on ian.marder@mu.ie. What we do as part of this project will be strongly shaped by your views, needs and participation, so please let us know what you think we should prioritise and what you are able to contribute. There will also be opportunities to revise this strategy later in the project, and we will regularly provide updates regarding our progress.

Dr. Ian Marder, Ursula Fernée, Tim Chapman & Dr. Kieran O'Dwyer

Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change, Core Members for Ireland

Strategic Pillar 1: Accessibility

Statement of Principle

Safe, high quality restorative justice should be available to all victims and offenders who would benefit from participation. Access should not depend, exclusively and in the absence of other considerations, on where they live in Ireland, their age, the offence in question, or the stage of the criminal justice process. Other affected persons should also be enabled to participate in restorative justice, if victims and offenders so wish.

Objectives

- a) Enough capacity should exist so that restorative justice is a generally available service in Ireland, as in a growing number of comparable jurisdictions. This requires services with enough practitioners who are trained, skilled and enabled to support victims and offenders to determine whether restorative justice is right for them, and to facilitate its delivery whenever this would be of benefit to the parties.
- b) There should be clear, simple mechanisms through which victims and offenders are systematically provided with accurate information about restorative justice and offered the opportunity to participate.
- c) There should be a range of practice models available with which to engage all victims and offenders who wish to participate in a restorative-informed intervention, even if the other parties in their case do not.
- d) There should be systems in place to ensure that restorative justice is consistently of a high quality, adhering to internationally accepted standards and research evidence on safe and effective practice.
- e) Diversionary, pre-sentence and post-sentence applications of restorative justice should be developed simultaneously, with the utmost sensitivity given to participants' differing needs and interests, depending on factors including the type of offence and the presence of trauma and other vulnerabilities.

Potential Actions

- i. Undertake a mapping exercise to establish the existing levels of training and practice, on the basis of which we can identify where the gaps lie and encourage those who are already trained in restorative justice to offer it more often.
- ii. Engage with management in government departments and criminal justice agencies on the questions of legislation, resources and capacity, the establishment of a criminal justice-focused high-level forum to consider new policies, standards and operational directions, and the provision of other crucial support for the development of restorative justice services.

- iii. Undertake research to estimate the costs and potential benefits of a comprehensive restorative justice service.
- iv. Engage with criminal justice agencies to inform and support the training of practitioners in restorative justice.
- v. Engage with management in government departments and criminal justice agencies to encourage further support and action to develop restorative justice. This may include multi-agency approaches to its delivery, its embedding in existing strategies and/or a new joint-agency strategy. These strategies should establish clear and simple referral pathways, encourage referrals to be made, and enable public agencies to share all the information required for restorative justice to take place.
- vi. Explore the potential to establish a local pilot project, underpinned by a multi-agency working group, in one or more counties in which there is a limited capacity to deliver restorative justice.
- vii. Explore and support the development of frameworks for improved data collection. This would enable further research on the nature, quality and impact of the existing services and on the extent to which current policies and legal provisions are being implemented.
- viii. Engage with criminal justice agencies and the relevant oversight bodies to support the development of restorative justice for conflicts which occur within the criminal justice context, but outside of the criminal procedure (such as anti-social behaviour, conflicts in prisons and public complaints against criminal justice practitioners).
- ix. Facilitate shared learning opportunities with experienced practitioners and other relevant persons in Northern Ireland and other jurisdictions.

Strategic Pillar 2: Knowledge

Statement of Principle

Restorative justice should be known and understood widely enough and to such an extent that all relevant persons are aware of its potential benefits and risks, and the available services.

Objectives

- a) All criminal justice professionals and other relevant persons should be aware of basic restorative principles and processes and feel confident enough that they could identify when a case might be suitable for referral to restorative justice and explain the process to a colleague, trainee, friend or prospective participant.
- b) Politicians, journalists and the general public should have a basic understanding of the meaning of restorative justice, and how and why it can be used in criminal justice.

Potential Actions

- i. Work with practitioner training bodies and those who design practitioners' inductions to include knowledge and training on restorative justice in their curricula.
- ii. Work with criminal justice agencies to increase the knowledge of serving practitioners and managers at all levels.
- iii. Disseminate briefings which summarise research evidence, provide case studies and outline how restorative justice could be used in each institution's area of operation.
- iv. Identify 'restorative justice champions' in each area and agency, from whom others who are unsure about the meaning or process of restorative justice can request advice, and who can lead national, local or institutional learning communities.
- v. Design and undertake a public awareness campaign which includes information about the meaning, potential benefits and availability of restorative justice.
- vi. Engage with national, local and special-interest media, both by discussing restorative justice with journalists and by publishing articles on the subject.
- vii. Engage with artists, designers and other creative professionals to discover new and innovative methods of communicating restorative justice.
- viii. Engage with universities, schools and educational policymakers to encourage students of all ages to be educated about restorative justice.
- ix. Engage with politicians of all parties and at all levels to raise their awareness regarding the meaning and potential benefits of restorative justice.
- x. Explore the possibility of observer schemes and study visits to other countries.
- xi. Identify victims, offenders, practitioners and other persons who have participated in or delivered restorative justice and who would be willing and able to speak publicly and to the media about their experience.
- xii. Ensure that information about restorative justice is available on criminal justice agency websites and other relevant websites (e.g. Citizens Information).

Strategic Pillar 3: Cultural Change

Statement of Principle

All persons working in or in collaboration with the criminal justice system should be trained in restorative practices so that they are confident in using these skills, principles and processes in their day-to-day work. This will help support the development of more responsive, relational, participatory, procedurally-just and reflective organisational cultures.

Objectives

- a) All persons working in or in collaboration with the criminal justice system will have the language, skills and tools to enable them to utilise restorative practices with the citizens over whom they have authority, or for whom they bear responsibility.
- b) All persons working in or in collaboration with the criminal justice system will have the knowledge and the capacity to identify when restorative practices could be used within their organisation, both internally and in the context of joint-agency working.
- c) Restorative practices should be used to help agencies to implement restorative justice (and manage other forms of change) in a procedurally-just manner. This would involve including all those with a stake in implementation in deliberations and decision making from the start of the process, enabling staff to participate in change.

Potential Actions

- i. Work with practitioner training bodies and those who design practitioners' inductions to include knowledge and training on restorative practices in their curricula.
- ii. Work with training providers to create CPD courses on restorative practices.
- iii. Work with criminal justice agencies to establish how they might best use restorative practices with citizens and internally (including in organisational decision-making and human resources), and to encourage professionals across all levels of management, practice and non-operational divisions, to learn about and use restorative practices.
- iv. Work with the relevant oversight bodies to embed restorative practices in their work and restorative principles in their organisational mission or values statements.
- v. Support and engage with existing local and national networks, community groups and training providers to encourage more collaboration in, and a focus on, the development of restorative practices in the criminal justice system.
- vi. Work with those who implement strategies and policies in criminal justice agencies to ensure that these processes involve meaningful engagement with all those whose buy-in and input is crucial to their success.

Steps to Implementation

On June 4th, 2019, we began the process of disseminating this strategy. We request that all those on the Stakeholder Group (or who otherwise have an interest in, or responsibility for, the development and use of restorative justice in the Irish criminal justice system) assist us in doing so by publishing the strategy on their organisational websites, mentioning it in their newsletters, and circulating and discussing it widely among their colleagues. We are currently designing the process by which, in collaboration with the Stakeholder Group and with other

stakeholders, we will devise and implement specific actions which contribute to achieving the objectives outlined under each Strategic Pillar. If anyone you know or work with would like to join the Stakeholder Group, please ask them to email ian.marder@mu.ie with their name, role and organisation, and we will add them to this list.

As you know, some of the work outlined in this document is already happening in small pockets across the country. Our intention is not to compete with or duplicate any of this work. Rather, we seek to help organise, motivate and provide a strategic platform for collaboration with as many stakeholders as possible, harnessing our collective knowledge, experience and energy to ensure that the criminal justice system takes full advantage of restorative principles and processes. Achieving these objectives will require a significant, sustained and collective effort. We are hopeful that, given the enthusiasm we have observed in recent months, many of you will be willing to contribute to these goals.

Future events and reviews of the strategy will be agreed at a later date, in consultation with the Stakeholder Group. In the meantime, we hope that this document will help you to think about how you might be able to develop restorative justice and restorative practices in your organisations and work. The adoption of the Council of Europe Recommendation provides us with a significant opportunity to take a significant step forward in this area, and we look forward to working with you on this in the years to come.



Dr. Kieran O'Dwyer presenting on the development of restorative justice in Ireland at Maynooth University, 01/03/2019.

Appendix A

Background to the Project

In October 2018, Dr. Ian Marder (Maynooth University, [Department of Law](#)), Gert Jan Slump ([Restorative Justice Nederland](#)), Tim Chapman, Dr. Bart Claes and Edit Törzs (all European Forum for Restorative Justice [[EFRJ](#)]) agreed to act as Project Partners on a new cross-European venture, entitled: *Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change*. The idea for this work emerged from conversations between several restorative justice scholars, policymakers and practitioners at the 10th conference of the EFRJ in Tirana, Albania, in June 2018.

The Partners agreed that the purpose of the project would be twofold:

- to contribute towards refocusing European criminal justice systems, agencies, policies and practices around restorative principles and processes; and
- to determine how the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)8 concerning restorative justice in criminal matters could be used to support this work.

These aims were to be achieved through the appointment of up to four Core Members from each participating jurisdiction, who became responsible for bringing together a wider national Stakeholder Group. Core Members will facilitate the co-creation of a strategy, in collaboration with their Stakeholder Group, by collectively identifying and distributing actions which seek to stimulate the implementation of the new Recommendation. The project is intentionally framed broadly so that participants from each jurisdiction are free to determine which actions are most needed and viable in each local context. European jurisdictions have diverse legal and criminal justice cultures and are at different stages in their implementation of restorative justice. The project assumes that persons who work within each jurisdiction are best placed to determine what is needed to develop this work locally. At the same time, the project assumes that there is value in cross-European collaboration which can enable us to learn from and support each other, sharing information on what does or does not work, under what circumstances.

In addition to Ireland, nine other European jurisdictions – Albania, Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Scotland – will participate in the project. Core Members from each jurisdiction are variously drawn from academia, justice departments, criminal justice agencies and NGOs. By participating in the project, Core Members committed to organising at least two events per year for their Stakeholder Group in order to co-create and implement a strategy for developing restorative justice.

In Ireland, the four Core Members are: Dr. Ian Marder (Maynooth University); Ursula Fernée (Restorative Justice and Victim Services Unit, Probation Service); Tim Chapman (Ulster University); and Dr. Kieran O'Dwyer (Kennedy Institute Peacebuilding Group). All Core Members were in place by January 2019, from which point the project will last for four years (i.e. to January 2023). Over the course of the project, it is hoped that we will make significant

gains in all ten jurisdictions, building on existing successes and stimulating or supporting the development of restorative justice in our criminal justice systems.

Appendix B

The Irish Context

Restorative justice has existed in Ireland ever since restorative youth cautions and pre-sentence restorative justice for adults were piloted in the 1990s (O'Dwyer and Payne, 2016). The concept gained further prominence at the turn of the 21st century with the passage of the Children Act 2001 and the establishment of a National Commission on Restorative Justice in 2007 (Gavin, 2015). At the same time, restorative justice was increasingly used in Northern Irish youth justice, as restorative conferencing became widely available as a diversion from prosecution, and legislation from 2002 required Judges, in most cases, to adjourn sentencing to enable restorative justice to be offered pre-sentence (Campbell, et al., 2005). In 2009, the Commission recommended that the existing restorative justice services be rolled out across the Republic, although the ensuing financial crisis prevented developments from taking place at the scale envisaged in their final report (Gavin, 2015).

Nonetheless, restorative justice work continued on the ground, with existing NGO services slowly expanding (McStravick, 2018). Ireland also remained at the forefront of research on the use of restorative justice in the aftermath of sexual violence, with the findings indicating strong support among such victims for this service to be available to them (Keenan, 2014; Zinsstag and Keenan, 2017). At the same time, community groups, practitioners and academics across Ireland continued their calls for both restorative justice and restorative practices to play a much larger role in criminal justice, as well as in schools, communities and other sectors.

In recent years, the institutionalisation of restorative justice has again gathered pace. It appears in the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017 which outlines what the process should look like, provides safeguards for participants and obliges statutory agencies to inform victims about restorative justice services, where available. The following year, the Probation Service launched its new Restorative Justice and Victim Services Unit in probation (Probation Service, 2018). 2018 also saw the release of *The Meeting*, a cinematic piece which took its viewers through a post-imprisonment victim-offender mediation in a real Irish case involving serious sexual violence (Byrne, 2018). Several further developments are also on the cards for the next two years, including the delivery of restorative practices training to all Garda Youth Diversion Projects in 2020 (Chapman, 2019), and the launch of Restorative Practices Ireland as a separate legal entity later in 2019 (O'Dwyer, 2019).

None of these developments, however, will eliminate the patchy nature of restorative justice service provision. Most victims and offenders are still not being offered the opportunity to engage each other in a facilitated dialogue – the most effective model of restorative justice

for supporting victim recovery and reducing reoffending (Shapland, et al., 2011; Strang, et al., 2013; Angel, et al., 2014; Sherman, et al., 2015; Bouffard, et al., 2017). Without substantial further action, the accessibility of restorative justice is set to remain contingent on the type of offence, the age of the offender, the stage of the process and the geographical location of the victim. We wish to see a future in which all victims and offenders have the information and the opportunity to determine whether restorative justice is right for them, as is supported by the new Council of Europe Recommendation (2018, 2018b).

The Recommendation also promotes the use of restorative justice in conflicts which occur in the context of criminal justice, but outside of the criminal procedure (such as for public complaints against the police and conflicts within prisons), and states that restorative practices can help shift the institutional cultures of justice agencies, enhancing the services they provide and improving their working climates. This project is similarly concerned with stimulating and supporting further developments in each of these areas.

In summary, we believe it is possible to use the Recommendation to take a significant step forward. There is much we can learn from the research and experiences of comparable jurisdictions across and beyond Europe (Dünkel, et al., 2015), and we will work with the Project Partners and Core Members from other jurisdictions to support us in this process. Much of the groundwork has already been done, and many of the right conditions exist, for further work in Ireland. The interest in this work across the Irish criminal justice system was epitomised by the scale of the project's recent launch event in Maynooth, and by the level of participation in the Stakeholder Group and in developing this strategy. It is crucial, therefore, that all interested practitioners, policymakers, academics and civil society organisations take advantage of this opportunity, working closely together to realise the full potential of restorative justice in Ireland.

Appendix C

Summary of the First Meeting of the Irish Stakeholder Group

On March 1st, 2019, the Core Members for Ireland organised a one-day symposium at Maynooth University, launching the Irish arm of the project and representing the first meeting of the Irish Stakeholder Group. 94 individuals participated in the symposium, including:

- 7 representatives from government departments;
- 29 persons from NGOs, charities and networks, including justice reform advocates and restorative justice, victim support and offender-focused services;
- 32 persons from the criminal justice agencies, including the Probation Service (12), An Garda Síochána (9), the Irish Prison Service (7), the Judiciary (3) and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (1). These included a combination of senior and middle managers, frontline practitioners and non-operational staff;

- 19 academics from 7 universities;
- 3 members of the legal profession;
- 2 persons from police governance bodies;
- and 2 persons whose affiliation was unspecified.

Of the above, 8 worked in Northern Ireland, where a new restorative justice strategy for adult offenders is under development. 78 others were either on a waiting list or wanted to attend but were otherwise unable to do so. After the symposium, all 78 persons were invited to contribute to this draft strategy by answering the questions asked of participants on the day.

The event began with inputs from each Core Member, before participants spent the rest of the day engaged in structured discussions over two sessions. The purpose of the first session was to gather views about the enablers and barriers to developing restorative justice in the Irish criminal justice system. Posters were placed around the room and, in an otherwise unstructured session, participants were asked to use post-it notes to provide their answers to the five following questions written on the posters (# of answers received in brackets):

1. What would help you to develop restorative justice in your organisation, work or region? (17)
2. What do you think would be the easiest changes to make happen? (13)
3. What changes to policy and practice do you think would make the biggest difference? (12)
4. What are the strengths of the restorative field in Ireland on which we can build? (11)
5. What are the biggest barriers to developing restorative justice in Ireland? (21)

Over lunch, the Core Members analysed the responses and identified seven themes for further discussion in the next session. The themes were: judicial engagement; political engagement; public engagement; victim participation; restorative justice and serious crime; prevention and diversion; and the resourcing of wider implementation.

The purpose of the afternoon session was to draw on the information gathered in the morning to explore what changes stakeholders thought should happen and what they would be willing to do to help make them happen. Attendees were divided into seven small groups, arranged in advance to ensure that each group would contain a mixture of people representing different types of organisation. The groups were allocated a facilitator and one of the themes. Discussions were structured as sequential circle processes, a restorative practice involving the participants sitting in a circle and the right to speak going around sequentially.

Facilitators were given a script which had been devised in advance of the event. The script contained five questions for discussion, including:

1. Tell us your name, role and why you do what you do.
2. What are your aspirations for restorative justice in your work, and what difference would it make?

3. What are your thoughts about the theme assigned to this group?
4. What, if anything, would you be willing and able to do to support the development of restorative justice in Ireland in the next 6-12 months?
5. What did you think of the sequential circle process and how might these be used in your organisation or work?

In restorative practices, the first question is known as a 'check-in', allowing the participants to experience how the circle process works and to build relationships within the group by sharing personal information, in advance of discussing the subject matter. The second question was designed to ascertain what the participants believed would be the optimal way(s) in which to utilise restorative justice in their work.

The remaining questions were designed to be future-focused and determine what the participants believed could realistically happen. For the third question, facilitators were asked quickly to devise a specific question based on the subject which their group was assigned. For example, the group which was assigned the 'political engagement' theme was asked: 'What actions do you think we could do to engage politicians on the subject of developing restorative justice?'. The fourth question was designed to delve further into what the participants thought would be realistic by asking them what they would personally be willing and able to contribute. Participants were told that their suggestion could be as small or large as they wanted, and that they were free to consult their offices before indicating a potential contribution at a later date. Participants were also told that, if they wished, they could put their name to their suggestion, allowing Core Members to follow up at a later date in order to ask whether they had found any barriers to achieving what they wanted to do. Each group also had a notetaker whose role was to document each participant's input during the circles; three of the notetakers were also tasked with taking notes during the day's whole-group sessions.

After a plenary session in which the notetakers fed back their groups' discussions and further conversations were held on each theme, the day finished with a closing panel, chaired by Prof. Claire Hamilton from Maynooth University. This began with Dr. Susan Leahy from the University of Limerick explaining the evolution of her views on restorative justice and sexual violence, before the Director of the Probation Service, Vivian Geiran, offered his reflections on the event and the project more broadly. Throughout the day participants were encouraged to use #RJireland when Tweeting; this hashtag will continue throughout the project.¹

¹ This event was supported by the Maynooth University Conference and Workshop Fund and the Maynooth University Department of Law. The Core Members were assisted throughout the day by several colleagues, including one administrator, three event volunteers, four notetakers and three facilitators.

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